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## Conservation Pledge

I give my  
pledge as an American  
to save and faithfully to  
defend from waste the  
natural resources of  
my country—its soil  
and minerals, its  
forests, waters  
and wildlife

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the interest of conservation  
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*A day to remember. The picture shows a young boy with a string of fish that he will remember for a long time. It's never too early to get a boy interested in fishing. Once initiated, he'll be a fisherman for life. This wholesome sport becomes a part of his life, and the future holds much promise for him. There are distant lakes and rivers that will attract him. Fishing will always be an important part of his recreation. Every adult angler should make it a project to take a boy fishing with him when he can.*

(Cover Photograph By Robert Dennie)

# LOUISIANA *Conservationist*

LOUISIANA WILD LIFE AND FISHERIES COMMISSION

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MILLIONS OF ACRES OF

# LOUISIANA MARSH BASS FISHING

**Guthrie Perry, Dudley Carver, Bennie Fontenot**

*(Photographs by Guthrie Perry)*

**L**OUISIANA IS blessed with 4½ million acres of coastal marshlands. The word marsh to many people connotes a lonely, desolate coastal bog abundant in mosquitoes, ducks, geese, and alligators. This is a place to dump trash, a mosquito breeding ground and a potential rice and cattle grazing ground to be drained.

The real value of the marsh is known only to a few. It is doubtful that there is any one spot in our state creating more conservation or claims than our marshes. To the commercial fisherman it is valuable as a spawning and nursery area for millions of fish and crustaceans, to the hunter as a valuable wintering ground for ducks and geese, and to the trapper as an area rich with muskrat, mink, otter, nutria and raccoons.

Marshes offer bird watchers one of the widest varieties of shorebirds to be found anywhere. A large number of birds such as egrets, herons, ibises, gallinules and rails nest here annually. During spring and fall migrations, countless thousands of small song birds use the numerous stranded beach ridges scattered throughout the marshes on their way to and from their northern resting grounds.

The Louisiana marsh is subjected to rapid changes in water level, salinity, and temperature. Fertile soils and a warm climate render Louisiana marshlands the most fertile in the world. It is said that the total protein production from an acre of marsh is approximately seven times the yield of good farm land. Therefore, the most fertile areas are in our marshes and consequently they support the greatest amount of animal life. These marsh waters drain into the gulf where it is diluted with sea water.

Very few people think of the marshes as a place for catching largemouth bass. In spite of the harshness of the marshes, in recent years the popularity of bass fishing in these areas has increased by leaps and bounds.

The species of fish present in the marshes are unique in that both freshwater and saltwater forms are found coexisting. It is not uncommon to find largemouth bass, blue and channel catfish, bluegill and crappie swimming right along

side red drum, weakfish, black drum, sheephead and Atlantic croaker. Although bass are found associated with these saltwater forms, they can only tolerate a limited amount of salinity.

Research conducted by fisheries biologist have found that approximately 12 per cent seawater is the maximum concentration at which large-



**Very few people think of the marsh as a place for catching Largemouth Bass. Record catches are taken from the many isolated lakes and potholes scattered throughout the marsh.**

mouth bass can successfully reproduce. Biologists have collected largemouth bass in study areas with saltwater concentrations as high as 29 per cent seawater and report that bass are rarely taken from areas that have more than approximately 12 per cent seawater. This is a relatively small amount and one should not expect to find bass in the extreme southernmost sections of our marshes where the saltwater content is greatest. The occasional occurrence of largemouth bass in saline waters is probably the result of for-



aging excursions into areas where saltwater forage species are abundant.

Spawning takes place in the early spring when the water temperature reaches approximately 65° F. The male has the task of building the nest. He swirls or fans a circular depression in shallow water on the lake bottom. He then drives the female onto the nest and the spawning of eggs and fertilization occurs simultaneously over a period of approximately two days. The female leaves the nest and the male cares for the eggs until the young are hatched. Hatching takes place in six to 14 days depending upon the temperature. The fry then rise over the nest as a school and remain in the area for several days. It is generally an accepted fact that bass spawn only once, however some biologists believe that our marsh bass may spawn again in August and September. The female bass will usually lay from 2,000 to 20,000 eggs. Of this spawn, only a small percentage are likely to reach sexual maturity due to predation.

The young fry commence feeding upon small aquatic insects and advance to a stage at which they will eat almost anything. Bass fishermen have reported finding such things as birds, snakes, frogs, rats, mice, muskrats, eels, crawfish, and lizards in bass stomachs.

Contrary to common belief, hurricanes play an important role in Louisiana's marsh bass fishery. Approximately every six years a major hurricane strikes the coastal area of Louisiana and drastically changes the ecology of the marshes. As the heavy saline waters roll over the marsh it kills a large portion of the freshwater fish, but there are usually a few hardy individuals that survive. These reproduce after the waters freshen up, and the population develops into one of expansion. This being similar to the fish population of a new impoundment. Most every fisherman is familiar with the success that is had during the first five or six years of a new lake. Hurricanes also kill most of the freshwater aquatics

which are forever a problem in marsh navigation and often create new ponds by its scouring action. The recycling of nutrients on the marsh floor during hurricanes is another benefit often overlooked that makes the water more fertile.

Marsh fishing is unlike any other in that the fish will often strike or bite when those of the northern impoundments will not. Reasons being that the populations are forever fluctuating due to oxygen depletions, hurricanes, and low water levels. Bass like all fish are cold blooded animals. Its metabolic rate (the rate at which it converts food to energy) is controlled by its environment and its body temperature adjusts to its surroundings. Fishermen have found that activity of bass in overly cold or hot water, is greatly lessened and they go into a sort of dormancy. Studies indicate that the temperature range for the greatest digestion or metabolism is between 60 and 80° F. This is the temperature range at which bass are the most active. The shallow waters of our southern marshes are warmer year round resulting in fish that are highly active, therefore constantly seeking food.

The bass of the murky marsh waters are characterized by their dark color. The bass usually will be dark green, with the sides lighter and mottled. The belly is a greenish-white. The average marsh bass caught will probably be less than 1½ pounds, but they do grow larger. It is not uncommon to see a 3 or 4 pounder taken. A marsh bass of 5 to 6 pounds is one to be mounted. Stock ponds and artificial lakes in this state have yielded bass much larger. The current Louisiana record is a fish that weighed 11 pounds, 11 ounces, which was taken from a stock pond in Washington Parish on November 16, 1958. Some fishery biologists believe that marsh bass do not get larger on the average because they live a fast hard life and die young as a result of the above mentioned conditions.

Largemouth bass can be taken year round in these southern waters but very few fishermen

The shallow marsh waters support dense stands of vegetation often making navigation by boat a real problem. It is a unique thrill to see a bass "pushing a wake" through this in pursuit of a lure. Only the most determined and stubborn fishermen will brave these adverse conditions to catch his limit of bass.





fish for bass during the winter months. Thousands of acres of prime marshlands are utilized for hunting during the winter as sportsmen turn to waterfowl hunting. A large number of excellent bass fishing areas are closed throughout the winter by landowners and are not reopened until the hunting and trapping seasons are over.

The most active season for marsh bass fishing is early spring. Many fishermen quit fishing the marshes later in the summer months because dense stands of aquatic vegetation make navigation by outboard almost impossible. Also, fishing success declines sharply as a result of excessive water temperatures. Only the most determined and stubborn fishermen will brave these conditions to catch his limit of bass. It is a unique thrill to watch one of these fish "pushing a wake" in pursuit of a lure.

Southwest Louisiana is fortunate in that several federal and state refuges have freshwater impoundments that are open to the public for sport fishing. Sabine and Lacassine Refuges are open for fishing during the summer months in the pools and canals under regulations that may be obtained at refuge headquarters. Rockefeller Wildlife Refuge will soon have a ninety acre impoundment stocked and open for sport fishing throughout the summer.

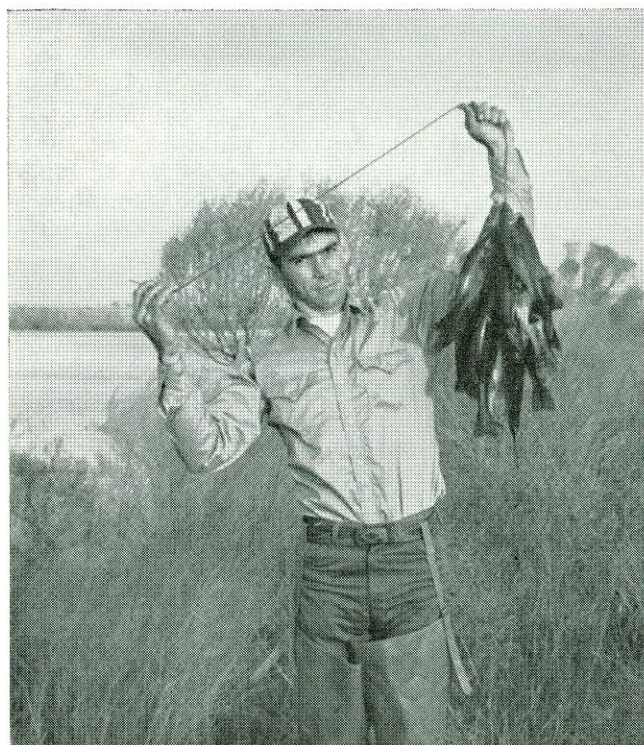
The Big Burn north of Creole, Louisiana is very popular to Southwest Louisiana bass fishermen. This area comprising approximately 25,000 acres is privately owned by Miami Corporation. Fishing is allowed by fee permit only. Permits may be obtained by contacting Alvin Dyson, Cameron, Louisiana. The Big Burn is open for fishing during summer months only.

The Hebert and Precht fishing area located just west of the Big Burn is also open for fishing on a fee permit basis. Permits may be obtained by contacting Whitney Hebert, Lake Charles, Louisiana. This area comprises approximately 2,000 acres.

The freshwater marshes around the Grand Lake-White Lake areas are tremendously productive, especially along the numerous cuts joining the pipeline canals with the surrounding marsh.

South of Morgan City, bass fishermen report that the Lake DeCade, Lake Penchant, and Lake Theriot marshes are excellent for bass fishing. Residents of Houma are proud of the bass fishery of Lake Fields and the Raceland marshes. Record catches of bass are also frequently taken from the lakes and pot holes around Thibodaux. Lake Boeuf located about half way between Raceland and Lac Des Allemands is another good fishing area.

The newly purchased 27,000 acre Lake Salvador Wildlife Management Area about 12 miles southwest of New Orleans supports quite an extensive bass fishery in its northern maze of oil field canals. New Orleans citizens are also fortunate in having the great Pearl River Drainage basin just to their northeast. Bass fishermen fish these marshes south of the Tupelo-Cypress swamps year round for largemouth bass.



**Job well done! A Louisiana bass marsh fisherman proudly displays a limit of Largemouth Bass. The average marsh bass caught will probably weigh less than 1½ pounds, but they do grow larger. It is not uncommon to see a 3 or 4 pounder taken.**

At the extreme southeastern tip of our state, the two thousand plus acre Sawdust Bend pool located on the Pass-a-Loutre Waterfowl Management Area is also open to public fishing. Tales of fishing excursions to these waters are widely spread over the state by bass and catfish fishermen alike. Also on Pass-a-Loutre and just below the Sawdust Bend area is the popular Freeport Sulphur impoundment consisting of several hundred acres.

Louisiana has not placed any size limits or season restrictions on the largemouth bass. However, bass fishermen are required not to take more than 15 in any one day and they can not have more than two days limit in their possession. Bass can only be taken by means of rod (or fishing pole), hook and line, trolling line, hand line, bait casting, and fly casting apparatus.

These marshes that we have briefly described are presently highly productive. It took nature millions of years to create these valuable areas and it is taking us only a few short years to destroy them through our so called "developmental" draining to establish housing areas, cattle districts and farm lands. Channelization and pollution are two more developmental terms that have resulted due to our progress. Most every sportsman can see these changes taking place. If you enjoy the thrill of marsh sports such as fishing and hunting and desire to see that these areas are preserved and not turned into biological deserts, support your local sportsman's organizations in their efforts to perpetuate better fishing and hunting.

Why not plan a marsh fishing trip soon? \*